

TOWER DISTRICT

SPECIFIC PLAN

**City of Fresno
Development Department, Planning Division**

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TJKM

March 26, 1991

IMPLEMENTATION

requests in buildings or structures constructed before February 13, 1954, from applicable underlying zone district parking requirements.

8.3 PUBLIC AREA IMPROVEMENTS

Several elements of this Specific Plan call for various kinds of public area improvements, such as the reversion of one-way streets to two-way streets and the public use and enjoyment of Dry Creek Canal. Such improvements not only require the cooperative action of several City departments and other public agencies and special districts, but also will require substantial capital expenditures. At this point, an appropriate action of the City Council is the appointment of a special citizens' task force, the purpose of which is to involve a representative group of Tower District residents and business interests in drawing up a detailed list of public area improvements, preparing preliminary cost figures, and identifying potential sources of funding. (In some communities, a task force of this nature consists only of City staff, and is referred to as a capital improvements advisory committee.) This task force, perhaps to be called the Tower District Plan Implementation Committee, is to meet regularly with City staff and other public agencies to share responsibility for arriving at time frames and priorities for specific projects, and then building support within the community to gain approval and obtain funding. The Tower District Plan Implementation Committee will need to prepare and deliver a progress report to the City Council on a regular basis.

8.4 CITIZEN PARTICIPATION & PLAN MANAGEMENT

Within 10 days of Tower District Specific Plan adoption, the City Council shall formally establish and appoint members to serve on the Tower District Plan Implementation Committee. The primary purpose of this committee is to advise and monitor the implementation of policies and recommendations of the Tower District Specific Plan. The committee will also prepare a comprehensive list of capital improvement projects for the Tower District, to include a brief statement on the potential benefits likely to accrue from each project; to establish priorities and time frames for construction; to develop preliminary cost figures; and to identify and recommend possible sources of funding. The committee will be assisted in this effort by appropriate City staff who shall prepare a separate listing of all implementation policies and measures contained in the Plan. The committee will need to meet frequently, particularly at the outset. In order to work efficiently, and to assure maximum participation of each member, the size of this committee is not to exceed eleven voting members. Within one year of its initial meeting, the committee shall prepare and submit to the City Council a detailed report, with findings and recommendations on implementation of the Plan. The report will also specify the capital improvement projects that should be undertaken within the Tower

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District and specific funding sources to implement the Plan and construct capital improvement projects.

Within 180 days of adoption of the Tower District Specific Plan, City staff shall deliver to City Council a report with recommendations regarding the establishment of a Tower District Design Review Committee. The primary purpose of this committee is to administer the Guideline Recommendations and other design-related items contained within the Tower District Specific Plan. The report to the City Council shall address function and scope of the committee; size and composition of the committee's members; operating procedures, including coordination of permit processing with other City departments; and other matters necessary for achieving an efficient and equitable handling of design review applications. The City Staff's report shall be reviewed by the Tower District Specific Plan Implementation Committee, which shall also make a recommendation to the City Council. As an interim measure, and until such time as the City Council acts upon the referenced City staff report and recommendations regarding design review for the Tower District, City staff is to administer the Guideline Recommendations and other design-related items of the Tower District Specific Plan. The interim design review process will consist of the following procedures:

1. Assessor Parcel Books at the City's Development Department public counter shall be marked to depict the boundaries of the Tower District Specific Plan Area. Building, sign, relocation, and demolition permits, and site plan review and development entitlement applications filed for property within the Tower District Specific Plan Area shall be subject to the design review process.

2. The Development Department and subcommittees of the Tower District Specific Plan Implementation Committee and the City of Fresno Historic Preservation Commission shall utilize the Tower District Specific Plan Guideline Recommendations to evaluate building, sign, relocation, and demolition permits, and site plan review and development entitlement applications. The subcommittees shall make recommendations to the Development Department Director for application of the Guideline Recommendations. The final decision on application of the Guideline Recommendations shall be made by the Development Director, Planning Commission or City Council pursuant to Fresno Municipal Code procedures for the processing of building, sign, relocation, and demolition permits, and site plan review and

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development entitlement applications. Whenever a site plan review application or development entitlement is considered for final action by the Planning Commission or City Council, the recommendation of subcommittees shall be forwarded to the Planning Commission or City Council.

8.5 FUNDING MECHANISMS

The following list of funding mechanisms is provided as a general guide to further opportunities for funding Tower District Specific Plan recommendations and should be further studied by the Implementation Committee. This list is not intended to be exhaustive and is not specific in its applicability to the City of Fresno. The recommended approach is to prepare a tailored program of funding mechanisms that is best suited to the city of Fresno and that leverages the funds available for the greatest effect.

AB 1693

Property and business owners of the greater Olive/Tower commercial district need to discuss and agree upon specific district boundaries, and then formally establish this district for purposes of promotion and protection of interests. The well-established instrument which allows property and business owners to set up this type of local benefit assessment district is AB 1693, also known as the Parking and Business Improvement Area Law of 1979. (See Sections 36500-36581 of the State's Streets and Highways Code.) Once such a district is established, funds become available to 1) acquire, construct or maintain parking facilities for benefit of the district; 2) undertake promotion of the district's business and commercial interests; and 3) fund minor improvements geared to beautification and enhancement of public areas. Most important, the Olive/Tower business community will be able to retain the services of a manager to handle promotion, advocate the interests of the district at City Hall and before the community at large, and assist with coordination of projects and programs affecting both public areas and private interests within the district.

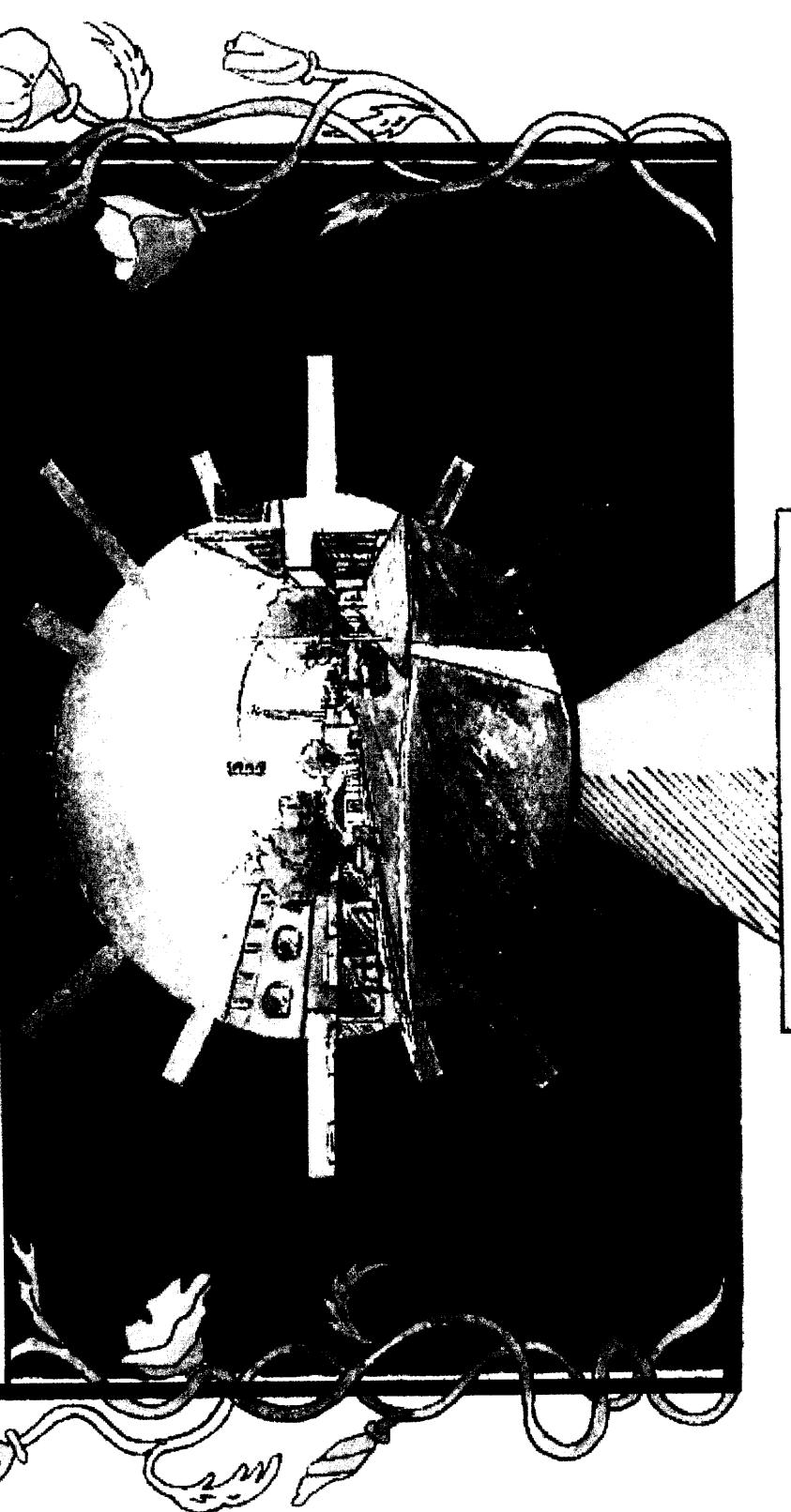
There are several experts, who possess "hands on" experience setting up AB 1693 districts. Drawing upon the services of one of these experienced individuals will greatly facilitate any effort to establish this type of program within the Olive/Tower commercial district.

Special Assessments

Special assessment districts can be created for properties in an identifiable area which would benefit from certain types of capital improvements. Assessments have a long history in California and much

Tower District

SPECIFIC PLAN DESIGN GUIDELINES



A.L.Schmitt 2004

A Joint Project of the Tower District Design Review Committee and the Tower District Specific Plan Implementation Committee, Fall, 2004

PREAMBLE

LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS

The City Council acknowledges and reaffirms the following fundamental concepts of the Tower District Specific Plan:

- 1) The purpose of the Tower District Specific Plan is to provide the City and the residents of the district with a comprehensive structure for managing historic resources and neighborhoods in the face of future change and development. The Plan is intended to address urban conservation and new development, with a framework of goals and policies for neighborhood quality and stability, for economic development and reinvestment, and for fiscal responsibility.¹
- 2) Both individually and collectively, the buildings, objects and places of the Tower District create a distinctive neighborhood identity. The Tower District remains an eminently livable area of the City.²
- 3) Change is a natural part of the aging process of a neighborhood. However, change which results in a loss of essential character-defining elements can greatly diminish if not destroy the value and meaning of a place. Different generations of residents will leave their individual marks on the houses and businesses of the Tower District. Individual design decisions for alterations, additions and new construction need to be looked at by the City to ensure that they are consistent with appropriate guidelines. The intent is to ensure that the physical integrity of the Tower District will be maintained. Without the adoption and use of design guidelines, the historic character of the Tower District will eventually be lost.³

The City Council finds that adoption and application of these Design Guidelines are necessary to ensure full implementation of the Tower District Specific Plan, and to protect the physical integrity and historic character of the Tower District Specific Plan Area, the Area's property values, and its economic vitality.



¹ Tower District Specific Plan, Introduction, 1.1 Purpose (p. 1-1).
² Tower District Specific Plan, 1.4 Plan Summary, Physical Setting (p. 1-3).
³ Tower District Specific Plan, Goal II, Objective 1, Policy 4 (p. 2-3).

Welcome to the Tower District Design Review Process!

We want you to feel comfortable with our process and encourage you to visit our Design Review Committee so we can offer our assistance with your project. In the Tower District we welcome high quality projects that enhance our neighborhood, are compatible with their surroundings, respect the integrity of the district, and consequently, add value to our entire neighborhood.

On the surface, design review can seem a bit daunting, but we assure you that we are here to help. We strongly encourage you to schedule a meeting with the Design Review Committee before you even begin your planning process. Making us members of your design team at the onset of your project will simplify the process considerably. The members of the committee are all volunteers, but we are intimately familiar with every aspect of our neighborhood and our planning process and can be of great help to you.

We have made every effort to be very thorough in explaining the many elements that should be included in projects to make them compatible with our neighborhood. The Tower District is home to a vast array of architectural styles, and while we promote compatibility, we pride ourselves on diversity. Consequently, we have also designed these guidelines with flexibility in mind. Every project is different and needs to be examined on its own individual merits. We want to encourage infill development, be business friends, and be cognizant of the market place. Being reasonable and being cooperative are two of our central goals.

Again, come visit the Design Review Committee at the beginning of your planning process. We meet regularly at City Hall. Contact our staff in the Planning and Development Department at 621-8277 to schedule a meeting. We enjoy helping our neighbors with their improvement projects and are always encouraged by those wanting to bring new developments to our area. We look forward to seeing you!

I. Introduction

The Tower District is a special place within the City of Fresno, with a long history and distinctive architecture that make it unique. However, the Tower District is not a museum exhibit preserved in amber, nor should it be. It is a dynamic, living neighborhood where new growth and development are welcome. However, since the Tower District is a special place, "any old thing" will not do. While we have no intention of freezing the neighborhood in time, we also have no intention of allowing it to be degraded. We want growth, and we welcome evolution—but we demand excellence and insist that the neighborhood maintain its distinctiveness. In the end, all neighborhood residents will benefit from properly designed growth. Never in the history of mankind has a neighborhood suffered from being too beautiful. With that in mind, we have established these guidelines.

A. History of the Tower District

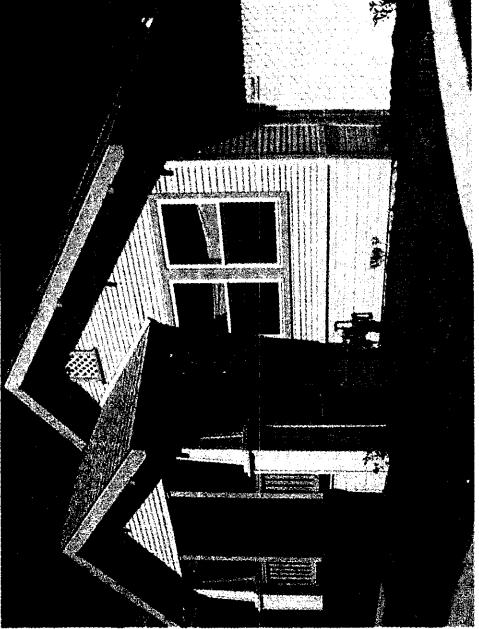
The Tower District began to develop in the early part of the 20th century as one of Fresno's first suburbs. When the Fresno Traction Company's streetcars extended into the area, a unique blending of apartment houses, small bungalows, and large homes evolved. As property values rose, the neighborhood became denser and more diverse. Neighborhood commercial areas evolved in a few areas, such as Weldon and Echo Avenues near Fresno High School, Van Ness Village at Van Ness and Floradora Avenues, Fulton Street south of Olive Avenue, and most significantly, along Olive Avenue.

During the decades after World War II, conventions in development and neighborhood design changed dramatically. Emphasis shifted from the streetcar and the pedestrian to the automobile. Several insensitive buildings invaded the Tower District area during this era and damaged its original character. However, the neighborhood emerged from this era in much better shape than other inner-city neighborhoods in Fresno. Although it had suffered some poor development and neglect of older structures, its urban fabric remained mostly intact.

In the late 1980s, the citizenry of the Tower District became very active in protecting the future of their neighborhood. This began with the opposition to an inappropriate building proposed for the area, which led to the development of the Tower District Specific Plan, adopted in 1991.



Home in the Porter Tract Historic District



Renovated Façade on Palm Avenue Bungalow

One of the outcomes of the Plan was the creation of a Design Review Committee, which has been operating since the plan was adopted. The strong activism of neighborhood residents continues to this day.

In the 1990s America experienced an urban renaissance. Downtowns in many cities gained population for the first time since the 1940s and people began to value traditional architecture and walkable neighborhood design again. The “New Urbanism” movement, which advocated a return to traditional town planning, swept the city planning profession. Old, neglected neighborhoods became “hip” again, and the Tower District was no different. As people began to crave an environment that was more interesting than modern subdivisions and strip malls, the Tower District was well-positioned to provide an alternative. Shops and restaurants in the area began to thrive, and homes and apartment houses began to receive facelifts. The area began to host city-wide special events, and blossomed into an important cultural center of the metropolitan area.

B. The Vision for the Tower District

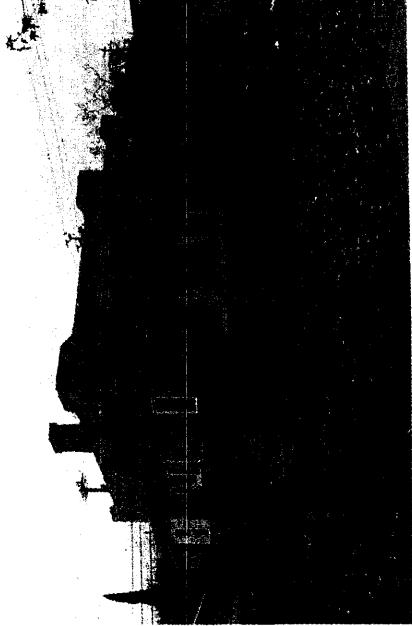
The vision for the future of the Tower District is twofold. First, the historic character of the neighborhood must be retained. For decades, pressures have been mounting to destroy historic structures, widen roads, and convert the area into something that resembles a contemporary suburb. This is not acceptable. Second, the residents of the Tower District envision it growing and evolving, just as it did during its first 40 years of existence, into an area that has even more vitality, more streetlife, more goods and services, more pleasurable public spaces, and more beautiful architecture. Most importantly, the Tower District has always been—and should continue to be—a little different from the rest of Fresno.

The origin of this vision is articulated in the following goals from the Tower District Specific Plan, which seek to preserve the special identity of the Tower District:

1. Conserve and enhance existing residential neighborhoods;
2. Respect and further enhance the historic character of the Tower District as a place not dominated by the automobile.
3. Conserve and revitalize the Tower District's historic and architectural resources.

C. Area of Applicability

These design review process and design guidelines apply to the Tower District Specific Plan Area, shown on Page 6. For more information, see Section E, below, (pg. 5).



D. The Purpose of These Guidelines

1. To assist property owners and developers by clearly describing what is expected of projects in the Tower District Specific Plan Area, thus minimizing delay and uncertainty.
2. To assist the Tower District Specific Plan Implementation Committee by guiding development in the neighborhood commercial mixed-use area until the update of the City's zoning ordinance is complete, ensuring that new projects enhance the established character of the area and increase its viability according to the principles established in the Tower District Specific Plan.
3. To assist the Tower District Design Review Committee by making it clear to developers and property owners what is expected of them from new development and the remodeling of existing buildings.
4. To assist the Planning and Development Department of the City of Fresno by outlining requirements for projects and minimizing conflicts with established plans until the revision of the zoning ordinance can be completed.
5. As used in these Guidelines, the term "should" means the Design Guidelines should be followed unless compelling and overriding reasons are found to allow deviations. Implementation of the Design Guidelines should not compromise the integrity, or undermine or conflict with the goals, objectives or policies of the Tower District Specific Plan.

E. How to Use These Guidelines

The guideline category that applies to a given property is determined by the zoning ordinance (see chart on page 7). Properties planned or zoned for Industrial uses, or properties planned or zoned for General Commercial land use between North Calaveras and North Blackstone Avenues, are not subject to these Guidelines. However, these properties are still subject to the design review process, design policies and objectives of the 2025 Fresno General Plan, and applicable Redevelopment Area Design Guidelines.

Use the following 2-step process to determine if these Design Guidelines apply to your project, and, if so, which chapter of the Guidelines applies:

1. Ensure that the subject property is within the boundaries of the Tower District Specific Plan Map as shown on page 6. If the property is not within the indicated boundaries, then it is not subject to the Tower District Specific Plan or these Design Guidelines.
2. Check the planned land use and zone district of the subject property (see the Tower District Specific Plan). This can be done by contacting the Planning and Development Department, City of Fresno at (559) 621-8277, or by visiting the department in person:
 - If the planned land use is industrial/light manufacturing, or the zone district is M-1 (Light Industrial), M-2 (General Industrial), or M-3 (Heavy Industrial), then these Design Guidelines do not apply to the property.
 - If the planned land use is general commercial, or the zone district is C-5 (General Commercial) or C-6 (Heavy Commercial) and the property is located between North Blackstone and North Calaveras Avenues, then these Design Guidelines do not apply to the property.
 - For all other planned uses and zone districts, check the "Design Guidelines Application Chart" on page 7 to see which section of the Guidelines applies to the property.

Design Review Committee Process & Submittal Requirements

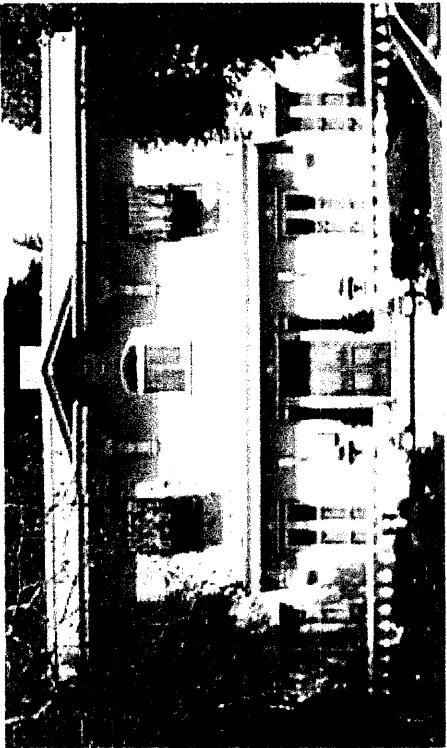
The Tower District Design Review Committee (DRC) is comprised of seven volunteer members, all appointed by the City Council members presiding over the District or by the Mayor.

The purpose of the DRC is to ensure that neighborhood improvements, from window replacement to new construction to street modifications, maintain or enhance the unique character of the Tower District.

The DRC meets regularly to review all proposals requiring a building or zoning ordinance special permit that falls within the boundaries of the Tower District, as defined by the map on Page 6. Review and recommendation from the DRC are necessary before the City can issue building permits for projects within the Tower District. Subject to agreement between the committee and City planning staff, staff can approve a permit without DRC review if the project is clearly in conformance with these Guidelines.

When you attend a DRC meeting seeking a formal recommendation, you should bring a site plan detailing the proposal, building elevations, and photographs of the original building. If it is appropriate to the project, the DRC may also require parking plans, landscape plans, lighting plans and proposed on-site signage plans. If you are proposing exterior changes to a building, you should bring samples of the material(s) you wish to use—siding, shingles, paint colors and so on. Applicants may be required to modify their proposed plans and resubmit to the DRC for review and recommendation.

For renovations of and additions to existing structures, every attempt should be made to keep the original appearance of the building. When you consider remodeling, you should maintain the original style and character of the building. You should use the original materials, architectural detailing and colors in your renovation or addition. In short, renovations and additions should blend in, not stand out.



Wolfe Home (1919) in the Porter Tract Historic District

Historic Properties

Several individual properties and one neighborhood (the Porter Tract) are currently listed on Fresno's Local Register of Historic Resources. Pursuant to the Fresno Municipal Code, Article 4 Chapter 13, these resources are protected under local and state environmental laws. In short, changes to the principal elevations are restricted although additions to the rear of the property or alterations to the interior are usually approved. Owners of designated historic properties may use the State Historic Building Code, apply for tax credits, and receive other benefits. Review of listed historic properties is the responsibility of the City's Historic Preservation Project Manager and the Historic Preservation Commission. The Design Review Committee may be consulted, however the ultimate design review authority for listed historic resources is the responsibility of the Historic Preservation Commission. For more information on the historic preservation program, please call (559) 621-8520.

Appeals

An applicant may appeal the DRC's recommendation to the City of Fresno Planning and Development Director. The DRC may submit its recommendation in writing to the Planning and Development Director, the Planning Commission or the City Council as it deems appropriate. If the DRC makes a recommendation that is inconsistent with these Guidelines in any respect, it should make written findings of compelling overriding considerations justifying such recommendation.

In the event of an appeal to the Planning and Development Director, the applicant and the Director should appear jointly before the DRC, and the applicant and the DRC should present their respective positions to the Director at that meeting. Neither the applicant nor the DRC may otherwise discuss the dispute with the Director. The Director should return to the next regularly scheduled DRC meeting to announce his or her decision. The Director may make a determination overriding the recommendation of the DRC, (which may be inconsistent with these Guidelines) only if such determination is accompanied by written findings of compelling overriding considerations justifying the determination.

Decisions of the Planning and Development Director as to the issuance of a Construction Plan Check, Building Permit, Demolition Permit and other ministerial acts are final, and no further administrative remedy is available.

An applicant, the DRC, or any interested person may appeal decisions as to development entitlement and special permit applications, including Plan Amendments, Rezones, Site Plan Reviews, Conditional Use Permits, Variances, Land Divisions, and other discretionary acts, to the Planning Commission or the City Council as permitted by ordinances of the City of Fresno.

We highly recommend that you discuss any project with the DRC before you pay to have professional plans drawn. This will save you both time and money.

F. Summary of the Design Guidelines

Even though most developers and property owners will not work in all areas of the neighborhood, it is helpful to understand the context in which your particular activities take place. Below is a brief summary of the Design Guidelines and the different elements of the neighborhood that they address:

I. Introduction

This section addresses purpose, applicability and process for using the Design Guidelines.

II. General Neighborhood Structure Guidelines

Traditional neighborhoods like the neighborhoods of the Tower District are typically based on a 5- to 10-minute walk from the edge to the center. The center of this area is mixed-use in nature, with commercial uses and often a high density of residential uses, too. Densities decrease toward the edge of the neighborhood. In the era that these neighborhoods evolved, people had to be able to walk to employment, shopping, services, and transit stops.